



Feline House Soiling

Although cats are very fastidious animals, feline house soiling problems continue to be their most common behavioral problem. Many factors can contribute to the development of house soiling problems. A complete medical workup is advised in all cases to rule out metabolic or urinary tract problems before assuming that the problem is purely behavioral.

Marking behavior

Description: Urine marking is a normal form of communication among cats. It is associated with two different postures:

Standing posture with the cat's hind legs straight and the tail up. The tail is usually quivering, and the cat may alternately step with its hind feet while spraying urine on a vertical surface.

Squatting posture where a small quantity of urine is deposited on a horizontal surface.

The targets for urine marking can be varied, but often involve the perimeter of the territory or socially significant items such as the owners clothing, or new items introduced into the household.

Although urine marking is a natural behavior for cats, it is obviously unacceptable in most households. Territorial marking behavior may be stimulated by multiple cats sharing a common living area, breeding season, or the arrival of new cats (or the smell of an unfamiliar cat) into a territory. Situations that evoke anxiety or stress in a cat (such as the addition of a new family member or a dramatic change in work schedules) may also lead to urine marking. The litter box is usually still used for routine defecation and urination.

Usually marking behavior starts after sexual maturity (6 months or older).

Treatment:

- ❖ Neuter males and spay females.
- ❖ Identify and remove trigger stimulus for marking (i.e. discontinue feeding stray cats, block views from windows, install cat fencing to keep other cats out of your yard).
- ❖ Change the function of the previously marked area to a feeding or play area.
- ❖ Make soiled areas aversive with foil or perfumes or tape.
- ❖ Treat the environment with facial pheromone (Feliway).
- ❖ Use enzymes to clean soiled areas (Mr. Max's Anti Icky Poo).
- ❖ Prescribe drug therapy if all else fails.

Inappropriate Elimination

Description: With inappropriate elimination, cats change their elimination areas to another part (or parts) of the house. The problem may involve urine and/or feces, and can be triggered by a variety of causes.

- ❖ **Medical problems:** Any disease that causes excessive urination may of the frequency or urgency associated with the elimination. Cats that have a painful experience in the litter box may avoid the box for future defecation (diabetes, infections, inflammation, etc).

- ❖ **Litter box aversion:** If the litter box is dirty cats will often choose a cleaner spot to eliminate. Each cat will tolerate a different level of odor in the box. Remember, a cat's sense of smell is much better than ours!
- ❖ **Substrate preferences:** Some cats may develop a preference for a particular texture (a particular type of litter, carpet or a down comforter for example) that is more pleasing on which to eliminate.
- ❖ **Location preferences:** Some cats may develop a preference for a particular location or locations for various reasons (privacy, dim lighting, quiet, more attractive odors, etc.).
- ❖ **Anxiety:** A negative experience such as being frightened while eliminating, or having the litter box tip over may cause the cat to avoid the litter box.

Treatment:

Treat medical conditions (urinary tract infections, stones, diabetes, etc.)

Clean soiled areas with an enzymatic cleaner

Limit access to soiled area(s)

Make the litter box more attractive

- ❖ Offer different litter box options like covered or uncovered.
- ❖ Offer different types of litter like potting soil or litter pearls, or sand.
- ❖ Make litter deeper.
- ❖ Provide multiple boxes in different locations.
- ❖ Clean all boxes twice daily.

Make soiled areas unpleasant with foil, plastic, or perfume (*do not use ammonia to clean* – it will attract the cat to pee there!).

Place a litter box at the new preferred location, and once the cat is using it, move it a few inches a day until it is in an area that you find acceptable.

Reward proper litter box use.

Prescribe drugs if all else fails.

How to tell the difference between Urine Marking Behavior and Inappropriate Urination:

	Inappropriate Urination	Urine Marking
Litter box usage	Usually stops using box	Continues to use box for normal urination
Quantity of Urine	Full bladder emptying	Small spots of urine
Preliminary signs	Straddling box, shaking paws	Provoked by seeing other cats or another household member
Target areas	Carpet or other suitable texture	Behavioral significance such as smell of the owner
Defecation	Often outside the litter box too	Usually still uses litter box